

North Vietnamese Infiltration

7 Aug 67

7 Aug 67 S-2429, Untitled Blind Memo re North Vietnamese
infiltration into South Vietnam

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Summary

North Vietnamese army troops infiltrating into South Vietnam through Laos during 1966 apparently sustained permanent losses of about 20 percent.* At least 53,000 and possibly 81,000 NVA troops are estimated to have successfully infiltrated into South Vietnam during 1966. Thus, from 10,000 to 15,000 men probably were permanently lost infiltrating during 1966. Three fourths of these losses resulted from death and permanent incapacitation due to illness -- overwhelmingly malaria. About one in ten of those lost were killed by air attacks and one in 20 are considered permanent deserters. The loss rate for 1966 appears to have increased perhaps three times over the 1965 rate and no data are available for 1967. Increased incidence of serious sickness was responsible for most of the higher 1966 rate. In addition, no losses were found in the reports surveyed which were directly attributable to air strikes during 1965. Perhaps as many as one half of all infiltrating troops suffer to some degree from malaria en route to South Vietnam. As a result of this and other known health problems perhaps as many men are not fit for combat when they arrive as are lost en route. Most of these men probably recover sufficiently to be used for combat.

* These estimates are based on a limited sample of data on infiltration and should be considered preliminary. See methodology below. Infiltration through the IMZ is excluded.

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Infiltration through Laos

The principle route used by North Vietnamese troops infiltrating to South Vietnam runs through the eastern portion of the Laotian panhandle. Troops move from their point of origin in the North to the general vicinity of Hill 1001 just north of the extreme western part of the DMZ. In the beginning all troops were trucked to the Hill 1001 area, but during 1966 were increasingly forced to move on foot as a result of air interdiction in the southern areas of North Vietnam. A series of trails leads south from Hill 1001 through the western corner of the DMZ into Laos, and from there along the Laos/SVN border and enters South Vietnam at Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam and other provinces south. Depending on the point of entry into SVN, the trip through Laos takes between one and four months.

The 20 percent estimate calculated for permanent losses from all causes in 1966 is supported by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] infiltration units usually are from 10 to 30 percent above authorized strength to compensate for attrition.

Although air interdiction apparently does not cause many direct casualties, it has had other significant effects. Units have been forced to change their mode of movement in NVN from truck to travel on foot increasing the time needed to infiltrate. (All infiltration movement in Laos has been by foot.) The additional time spent travelling by foot in NVN results in a higher rate of sickness in NVN and also in Laos.

During 1966, at least 53,000 and possibly 81,000 NVA troops were estimated to have infiltrated into South Vietnam. If 75 percent of them

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... through Laos, then based on the 20 percent permanent loss rate, 10,000 and possibly 15,000 men were lost while infiltrating.

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Methodology

The table below summarizes the data used for the estimates in this report. A total of about 7,000 infiltrators in eleven units varying from company to regiment in size make up the data base. Four units with 1,777 men infiltrated during the last half of 1965 and seven units with 5,399 men infiltrated throughout 1966. All information is taken from interrogation reports and the method of selecting reports was random. Poor interrogation methods caused gaps in information and as a result the data base for each estimate is less than the total. To produce estimates of permanent losses it is assumed that one half of all deserters eventually are returned to duty and that two-thirds of the men who drop out of their units during infiltration are eventually returned to duty.

	Arriving in SVN during last half of 1965	Arriving in SVN during 1966
(1) Deserters	14 of 1,777 = 1 percent	60 of 2,090 = 2 percent
(2) Killed by Air Attack	0 of 200 = 0 percent	94 of 4,270 = 2 percent
(3) Died from Sickness	23 of 1,407 = 2 percent	79 of 1,270 = 6 percent
(4) Dropped out of Unit*	42 of 1,277 = 3 percent	117 of 390 = 30 percent

* Although some portion of this sharp increase may result from the inadequate data base used, there are reasons to believe that there has been a steady increase in sickness. Troops that march in NVN to Laos begin their march in Laos in a weakened condition and medical care in Laos has deteriorated.

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For 1965: $1/2$ of (1) plus $1/3$ of (4) plus (2) and (3) = 3.5 percent.

For 1966: $1/2$ of (1) plus $1/3$ of (4) plus (2) and (3) = 1.9 percent.

Distribution:

Orig. & 1 - Address
1 - D/CER
1 - ADD/OER
1 - St/FR
1 - St/CS
1 - SAVA
1 - D/T
1 - T/SP

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